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ABSTRACT

The intent of this article is to describe the basic processes used by the child in order to create and imagine; to explain the significance of objects for encouraging creativity, imagination, and intellectual growth; and to show how creative thinking is nurtured using the world of objects. Five reasons are advanced to support the claim that the object world of the young child is fundamental to creative thinking and imagination. Four ways children may use objects (exploration, repetition, replication, and transformation) are described, and three basic elements of creative thought (internal reality, internal motivation, and internal control) are identified. It is argued that for adults to guide children's creative thought, they must understand and apply the basic elements of creative thought in the context of exploration, repetition, replication, and transformation. In conclusion, illustrations are provided of ways adults can facilitate children's creativity by encouraging these four uses of objects. (RH)

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# FACILITATING CREATIVE THOUGHT THROUGH OBJECT PLAY IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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# Facilitating Creative Thought Through Object Play in Young Children

## Introduction

Recently, Trostle and Yawkey (1982, in press) took the position that creativity and play should be considered the FOURTH 'r along with reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Linking creativity to developing thought, Trostle and Yawkey described several adult strategies that would link creativity with the THREE 'R"s in context of school curriculum for young children. For example, some of these useful adult strategies are: (a) adding oral cues to the setting (e.g.,, The adult says "Show how Dolly would walk to the store to buy some bread!"), and (b) showing playfulness (e.g., The teacher says, "How much father must we climb to reach the top!" as this adult pretends to climb the beanstalk with the children while they portray "Jack and the Bean Stalk"). These and other strategies explain "what" routines to use and describe "how" and "when" to use them for enhancing creativity and play while using the basic skills. In testing these strategies in a recent study, Yawkey (1982, in press) felt that while they are importrant, the truly salient features are the uses the child makes of objects for creative and imaginative thought. In other words, the adult cues or strategies are external to the child, whereas the uses of objects are internal and generated by him. Thus, the intent of this article is to: describe the basic processes used by the child in order to create and imagine; explain the significance of objects for encouraging creativity, imagination and intellectual growth; and show--through adult guidance--how creative thinking is nurtured using the world of objects.

## Objects and Creative Thought

First, the young child lives in an object world--a world of differently colored and uniquely shaped things. Objects facilitate cognitive and social growth and

become the sensoral building blocks of all adaptive development and creativity. Second, for the very young child, activity in the context of objects such as "making dailing movements on a telephone" is a necessary ingredient for, and a precursor to, thought--both creative and adaptive. Erikson (1965) says that the youngster's world is object-oriented and that he learns initially to differentiate between himself and his play objects. This prepares the youngster to master his world of manageable toys. As mastery of objects continues into the toddler and preschool years, the child returns to his world of manageable objects for support and reassurance when his self or ego becomes threatened in the more social world of people and ideas as objects.

The third reason for the importance of the object world rests in the relating of creativity and make-belive to representation or the mental processes of internalizing, recognizing, and understanding physical, logico-mathematical, and social knowledge (Nicolich, 1975). Creative thought permits the exploration and mastery over the environment of objects and allows the youngster to become chief actor, cognizer, and social participator (Blohm & Yawkey, 1977). Objects serve as a medium for the child to relive:

> symbolically his own life in order to assimilate more easily its various aspects as well as to resolve daily conflicts and realize unsatisfied drives (Piaget, 1962, p.107).

Fourth, the interaction occurring between the youngster and his environment implies creative and imaginative thought because it results in producing novel events, ideas and objects (Neumann, 1971). Even though the objects are common ones, such as blocks, trucks, paints or rocks, they are transformed in the creative act from the familiar to the unfamiliar (Trostle & Yawkey, in press).

The fifth reason that the world of objects is important rests further in the interaction between the child and his world. Creative thought, which is based on the interacation between the child and his environment, can be guided by the

adult's understanding of the four uses of objects (Neumann, 1971). The four uses are: exploration, repetition, replication, and transformation. The uses of objects to serve creativity are ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract. The first use, explorative use of objects, is the child's examination of them by rolling, pounding, biting and employing other actions with them. Through exploration, children come to know new or novel objects and/or to turn familiar objects into unfamiliar ones.

Second, the repetitive use of objects sustains the youngster's internal motivation and effectance by repeating actions on objects over and over again. Through repetition, the child practices and rehearses object functions and comes to better know his physical world. Third, replication means that the child uses objects in realistic and reality-oriented ways. The child who employs Lincoln Logs or Legos to build a "house" shows the replicative use with them. Through this reality level, the youngster perceives how play objects function in real life. The creative use of objects at this phase prepares for transformation—the most advanced and creative use.

The transformative use expands the youngster's role with objects by extending their functions toward more advanced and abstract levels of creative thinking. With this use, objects may live and breathe like humans, they change forms and may fly like airplanes, and they may change in color or in a variety of other ways. Creative thought means understanding the many potential uses of objects.

In short, the object world of the young child is fundamental to creative thinking and imagination. Through the quality and quantity of the interaction that occurs between the youngster and objects, creative thought evolves, develops, and can be sustained and enhanced.

## Some Basic Processes Underlying Creative Thought

Adult strategies or routines are imperative in guiding and enhancing creative thinking (Trostle & Yawkey, 1982, in press). Yet, the research results of Yawkey (1982, in press) show that objects, their uses and the setting are primary to creative growth. In order for teachers, parents or caregivers to use strategies effectively for developing creativity and imagination, the processes basic to their growth in children must first be understood. Then, the strategies are tailored to these processes which form the minimum boundaries that differentiate creative from adaptive thinking (Piaget 1962). Using the adult-strategies without regarding the child's processes which are necessary for creative thinking to flourish can actually decrease creativity and imagination (Yawkey, 1982, in press).

Regardless of the strategies used by the adult, the basic kernels or elements of creative thought are: internal reality, internal motivation, and internal control (Neumann, 1971; Yawkey & Hrncir, 1982, in press). Therefore, in order for the adult to guide creative thought, he or she must understand and apply the basic kernels and in context of the four uses of objects: exploration, repetition, replication, and transformation. First, internal reality means that the youngster suspends the external world to enable him to think creatively and to show "as if" actions or imagination. For example, the youngster must suspend external reality when he creatively transforms a "Campbell's cardboard soup-box" into a "magic-carpet"--complete with creative sounds and movements.

Second, internal motivation, as another element or kernel of creative thought, means that creative thought comes primarily from the child (or peer group) and not directly from the adult. Motivation to create becomes maximized when youngsters follow through with their own desires and wishes (Cadzen, 1976). The third element is internal control. It is the degree to which children--in their activities--exercise their own direction and wishes in thinking, planning, and

following through. In brief, inner directedness increases creative thought while outer directedness decreases these imaginative and playful actions and activities.

Together with the four uses of objects, these basic elements and any set of strategies the adult can guide and nuture creative thinking in young children. The following section shows adults how to develop the four uses of objects in context of these basic kernel elements that enhance creativity.

## Using Objects to Serve Creative Thinking

Three elements separately or combined, denote the presence of creativity. These elements are not static—they are dynamic and internal mechanisms which facilitate creative thought. The child's latent creativity emerges and flourishes through his or her hierarchical applications of objects in activities which are specifically designed to meet the youngster at his current creativity level and advance the child's present creativity stage to more advanced ones. Informed adults merely provide the cues or prompts which encourage the child who is using objects, as his or her own internal control and motivation, provide the fuel for creativity. Four categories of applications of objects by the youngster beacon the adult to provide appropriate creativity-stimulting cues: (a) exploring with objects; (b) repeating previous actions on objects; (c) replicating with objects; and (d) transforming with objects.

Exploration using objects, the first category, involves the child's simple movements and an examination of (one or more) materials. The youngster's primary intention is to discern interesting visual, textural, auditory, olfactory, or other sensory information regarding an object which is novel, surprising, or intriguingly complex. The "what is it?" question then becomes paramount to the child. And, he comes to know the object, its properties and what he can do with it.

For example, three-year-old Nina, during the free play time at her nursery school, wanders from one toy area to another, exhibiting little interest in any of the familiar objects. However, upon encountering jars filled with new, bright shades of play dough, Nina regards the opened jars with sustained attention and obvious curiosity. She looks from one jar to another, occasionally poking a finger into the centers of one of the mounds of colored dough inside. Discovering that the bright green dough is fitted rather loosely inside the jar, Nina turns the jar upside down. Nina looks on with curiosity as the green dough falls out onto the counter. The watchful adult tries to enhance exploration with this object when attention decreases stating, "Look, Nina! The play dough is round in the center and flat on each end. Can you make the green dough form other shapes? Show us!" Help is then provided as necessary, to assist the child as he explores the dough and makes new shapes with it. Other containers of dough of different quantities and colors may also be introduced at this time to help the child further explore.

The facilitation of exploration may also involve other strategies. Examples follow:

(a) Jose and Dena remove building blocks from a large bag. The adult supplies additional, differently shaped, colored, and sized blocks, stating, "Here are some new blocks to add to the others. Show how you use them!"

(b) Carl approaches the easel and paint corner. The adult encourages Carl to try painting with each of the paint colors. Brushes of different widths, as well as sponges and fingerpaints, are additional supplies which facilitate the youngster's exploration.

(c) Monica, deep in concentration, slowly pours water from the fountain into a cup. The adult supplies containers of different shapes, stating, "It's fun to watch the water fill the cups! Here are some new glasses.

Would you like to see how many new ways you can use water with these glasses?"

The second category of using objects to serve creativity is repetition. It is recognized by the child's continuation of movements or actions which may have begun during the exploration phase. Once again, the adult can sustain and further motivate the child by using objects for repetition. Continuing Nina's play dough example, the adult follows the child's lead when, during exploration, the youngster encounters an interesting or amusing phenomenon with the object. Nina forms a long, rounded shape with the dough. She begins to roll it back and forth. The adult enthusiastically states, "Nina, that play dough surely has changed its shape! And you have shown that it can even roll along for a while--all by itself. I wonder how the dough can move when it is shaped in those other ways which you showed me earlier? Will the dough roll when it is in the shape of a box? A kite? A doughnut? Can you think of any other play dough shapes that might also move in different ways? Let's show Fred how the different shapes can move!"

Repetition is also extended as the adult develops, uses, and reinforces children's creative ideas. Examples of these variations and extensions include:

(a) Lisa randomly places different shapes of paper on her head, as her friends gaily laugh with each new "look". The adult supplies cloth scraps, string, scissors, cloth flowers, ribbon, and feathers, stating, "You are having so much fun with that paper on your head! Here are some more things you may all use to make some handsome hats!" Necessary adult help is offered as the interested children construct unique, and often hilarious, headgear.

(b) Thomas and Bradley tap their feet to the pronounced rhythm of a marching record. The alert caregiver, at this time, supplies a variety of rhythm instruments and adequate space in which a "marching band"

can majestically parade. Other interested youngsters are invited to "join 'n the fun!"

(c) Emma, in the drama corner, wiggles two "puppet" fingers, which represent familiar people. Disguising her voice, alternately, as that of an old man and that of a young baby, Lisa begins a dialogue. The facilitating adult supplies onlooking Todd with an old man's hat and cane. Emma dons a baby blanket and ruffled bonnet. The real drama commences!

Category three, replicative uses of objects for creativity, involves the child's construction of reality elements while using play materials and other objects. The natural creativity sequence for the youngster enables him to readily progress from the state of repetition with objects to the more advanced stage of reality construction. Adults are instrumental in providing additional supplies, encouragement, and motivation for the child's replication attempt. Nina, for example, has discovered, through repetition attempts, that the "doughnut shapes" of play dough will easily roll along the counter. However, the "kite shapes" merely fall when she uses the identical strategy with them. Resultantly, Nina may decide to use four of the doughnut shapes underneath two of the re-joined kite shapes to form a convertible vehicle. The adult, providing necessary assistance, may later exclaim, "Nina, you have made a lovely green and blue car with the dough! Here is some sand and some paper and crayons. Maybe you would like to make a road for your convertible. This magazine picture of a busy highway may give you some ideas for your road. Or maybe you and your car could join Terry and Jesse. They are building some trucks."

Replication of reality is easily developed, facilitated, and advanced by the caretaker, teacher, or parent. The following examples demonstrate replication-facilitating approaches:

(a) The children observe a home or classroom's pet--a turtle, a gerbil, a goldfish, or a hermit crab. The adult states, "Godfrey Goldfish is swimming all around his tank today. Let's see how many different ways we can find to show how Godfrey looks! Use watercolors, brushes, sand, tiny shells, colored tissue paper, and glue any way you wish. Then we will make a fine fish display!"

(b) A small group of youngsters enthusiastically reminisce about a recent story or television show they have heard and enjoyed. The adult provides a tape recorder, related music records, a stage area, and costume materials so that the children can re-enact their favorite part of the story.

(c) The adult draws a large house-shape on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper which is taped to a wall. Each youngster designs and furnishes one room of the large house, using colored chalk, construction paper and glue, or liquid markers. Later the children describe their own "special rooms." Unusual or novel ideas are praised.

The fourth and final category is transformation. It involves the child's extending the identity of the object to higher levels of creative thought. Nina's green and blue convertible, for example, forms the replicative foundation for Nina's later experimenting with transformations. Thus, the adult supplies additional materials, such as paper clips, paper, yarn, paint, scissors, and fabric scraps. Nina applies the materials to the convertible in unusal and creative ways as the adult "stands by" to offer support and help, as requested. The convertible, miracously, becomes an original "convertiplane", as Nina uses paper, scissors, and liquid markers or paint to form red and yellow wings; fabric scraps become colorful windows, and paper clips are joined to form a propeller. The fascinating, new creation travels on the sandy road which Nina built earlier. Moreover,the versatile

vehicle flies boldly into the air when spun around by a yarn length which is tied securely around the body of the "convertiplane."

Transforming is also facilitated by the creativity-inspiring adult in the following ways. These examples include:

(a) Each youngster receives a sheet of paper, on which a face and body outline appears. The youngsters add colored yarn, paste, felt, buttons, and crayons, at their own discretion, to depict their projected future job roles. The colorful nurses, plumbers, barbers, dentists, and firepersons are later discussed and proudly displayed.

(b) The caretaker and a child carefully disengage the pages of a familiar storybook. The pages are scrambled and the child tells his own amusing and inventive, new story from the re-ordered pages!

(c) Heavy yarn or string, a variety of seashells, liquid markers, and glue are the supplies needed for youngsters to construct decorative jewelry. The children are encouraged to "make a necklace, a bracelet, a belt, earrings, a ring or a 'suprise object,' using the string, the colored markers and the sea shells." The adult provides assistance with stringing the yarn through the narrow holes in the shells and tying the knots or bows in the finished products. An exclusive fashion show culminates the creative transforming activity!

As the children begin to use objects creatively, the perceptive teacher, parent, or caregiver provides encouragement for the development, use, and extension of one or more of these four categories. Keeping a handy and varied supply of creative materials on hand at all times is "a must"; otherwise, creativity as it first appears, may not soon return again. Encouragement and enrichment of the younger child's exploration proceeds his repetitive use of the objects in novel ways. Thereafter, the child progresses to replicative uses of objects--reconstructing reality as it is seen through his own eyes. Transformative

extensions of an object's identity marks the fourth use of objects that serve creativity. The children's joyful expressions of spontaneity and the genuine pleasure that is gleaned from learning through discovering will richly reward the adult who responds to the youngsters' emerging creativity through objects.

## Summary

In summary, using objects to enhance crativity in the youngster results in his growth along several important dimensions. The enhancement of imagination, adaptive thought, social skils, cognitive functioning, and understanding of the external world of the young child are the paramount outcomes when the adult sensitively adapts the enrivonment to promote creative thought.

As the caregiver, parent, or teacher integrates the youngster's internal reality, internal motivation, and internal control in the context of a supportive, rich, and varied environment, object creativity abounds. The child's object use expands from exploration to repetition to replication to transformation.

At the same time, the child, himself, is transformed into a more creative, more autonomous, more socially and intellectually-aware human being.

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